

Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat

FEBRUARY 1983

EXCURSION - NEWS SHEET

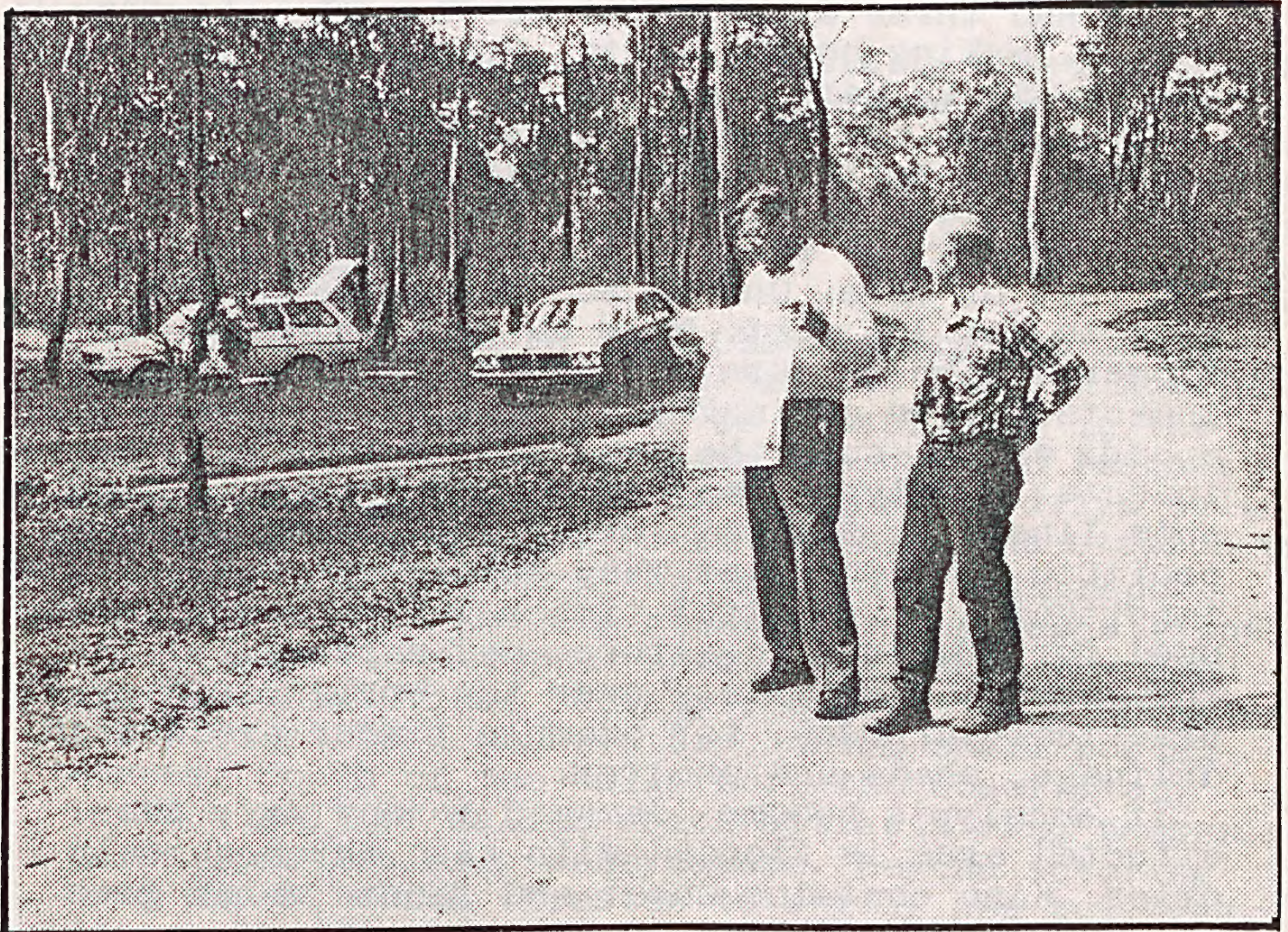
Meeting: 4th February, "Spiders", Mr. H. Barclay

Meeting: 4th March; Annual Meeting -Members' Night.

Excursion: 6th February:Wombat State Forest and Dean Reservoir,(3.00pm to 9.30pm)Leader Dr.

Excursion F. Harrap.

6th March:Enfield, Leader Mrs. P. Murphy,
Full Day.



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Meetings, as specified, are held in the Administration Building of the School of Mines and Industries, Lydiard Street South, Ballarat, commencing 8 pm.

EXCURSIONS, AS SPECIFIED, COMMENCE FROM CROCKERS, Cnr. STURT and ARMSTRONG STREETS, BALLARAT. AT 9.30 am FOR FULL DAY OUTINGS, OR AT 1.30 pm FOR HALF DAY.

WOMBAT STATE FOREST AND DEAN RESERVOIR EXCURSION.

This is a late afternoon and early evening excursion, with a view to seeing platypuses in the evening, as well as missing some of the hottest part of the day. It is suggested that members bring afternoon tea and tea. Meeting at Crocker's corner.

NEW MEMBER: The President welcomed Mr. Kevin Wickson, wishing him a long and happy association with the club.

MEETINGS in 1983 will be in the new Staff Room S.M.B. Lydiard St.

MEETING, 3rd December 1982.

We had three speakers at our December meeting - Mrs. J. Jenkins on Eucalypts, Trevor Lumb sea birds and Dr. Frank Harrap on the Plain Wanderer.

Eucalypts are like Flora and Fauna in this country - a leftover from a bygone age remained, forming a most interesting group of plants. They range from a few feet in height to huge giants 300 feet or more. One in the Cumberland Valley is said to top 300 feet. They have an abundance of flowers which in turn provides food for a host of insects, birds and mammals. Some of the pests are aphids which suck the sap, leaf eating, and boring insects. Eucalypts range from the desert to the snow line with the rainforest area being the most prolific and important. They supply some of the most important and beautiful timber in the world, being used for housing, furniture, and paper pulp. They are planted widely over the world for many practical purposes, for example timber production drainage, shade and shelter.

If eucalypts become damaged in any way, the affected area is flooded with kino which quickly dries. Kino contains sugar and tannin which give it food value. Ants carry it away, and sugar gliders often bite grooves in the bark to get at it.

Eucalypts would be one of our most widely

distributed exports often doing better overseas than here, because of the absence of pests and die-back which is our most serious problem.

Sea birds are among our most fascinating birds. Apart from penguins they are all superb flyers, some covering many miles in search of food. Many are migratory and only visit our shores at certain times, while others are seen only when blown off course or straying from their usual haunts. Those that feed on the sea line are very numerous and some of the most interesting. One wonders who taught turnstones to do this.

Congratulation to Frank on his Happy Wanderer. Few indeed have seen this rare little bird - related to the quail and Frank's talk and slides were most interesting.

Our three speakers were suitably thanked and the usual small presentation made, completing a very enjoyable evening.

L. Fink-

WESTERN AUSTRALIA RE-VISITED.

A visit to Eyre Bird Observatory was the highlight of another flying trip to Western Australia in Spring. The observatory is established in the old Eyre telegraph station on the western reaches of the Great Australian Bight, two hours drive south of Cocklebidy by 4WD. Built in 1877, the station was abandoned in 1927 when the East-West telegraph line was moved. The old stone building was stripped and fell into disrepair until 1977 when the RAOU and P.O. Historical Society restored it as Australia's first bird observatory, and a small postal museum. South of the Nullarbor, the observatory is in a belt of mallee which attracts many passerine birds, particularly honeyeaters. Beyond towering sand dunes, which threaten to engulf the building, is a beach frequented by migrating waders. The observatory is in the Nuytsland Reserve, a wilderness area, and the honorary warden Peter Congreve

and his wife Diana carry out numerous scientific projects, recording data and observations, and playing host to an endless trickle of visitors, mostly scientists and birdwatchers. During my brief stay I took part in a transect count through the mallee area, helped with some birdbanding with mist nets, and went on a very exciting beach count, recording the species and numbers of waders and details of their bands. Best sighting was a flock of four Great Knot.

Before Eyre in WA we travelled north almost to Carnarvon, to the trade winds latitudes around Shark Bay, Denham (opposite Dirk Hartog Island) and Monkey Mia, where dolphins cruise along the beach playing with the swimmers. Wildflowers around Geraldton and Jurien Bay were superb, but at that stage not yet in season in the southwest, which I visited later. The holiday was remarkable for a number of close-up sightings of birds, no more than 5 m away - Redthroat and White-fronted Honeyeater at Murchison River Gorge, an Osprey at Geraldton, Western Warbler and Brown Honeyeater at King's Park, the Splendid Wren (well-named) at Cape Naturaliste, the Red-winged Wren at Two People's Bay and the beautiful Blue-breasted Wren at Eyre. The wrens were additions to western species I had seen on a previous visit. The Noisy Scrub-bird eluded me again, though I listened to him singing only metres away for about two hours - apparently a privilege, as a team of NZ ornithologists in the area the previous day had not even heard one. I also heard the Western Bristlebird (equally rare) and Western Whipbird at Two People's Bay, though conditions were too windy for them to come out of the heath on view. Like the Scrub-bird, the Bristlebird is virtually never seen.

Margret Rotheram.

EMUS IN THE DISTRICT PRE GOLD-RUSH.

Mr. Tom Evans, MP, has discovered some interesting early records of emus in this district. A keen local historian, Mr. Evans is continually unearthing new items of interest, particularly relating to the era before the discovery of gold, where he is concentrating his research. He recently came across the following story in the narrative of George Russell, an early settler at Golf Hill, near Shellford:

"The winter of 1838 was like the previous one, very dry, no floods occurring in the rivers and creeks.

About the month of August of this year, Mr. Joseph Sutherland and myself started on an excursion to visit Mr. Henry Anderson of Winter Flat (Anderson & Russell were partners in this station -note by Evans) and the Messrs Yuille who were settled in the same neighbourhood.

After stopping with them a few days, we went on to the Messrs Coghill who had just taken up their Station at Coghills Creek, calling on Pettet, Dowling Forest Station, who had formed a Station in connection with Mr. W.J.J. Clarke senior.

After leaving the Messrs Coghill's Station, we went as far as the Station occupied by Messrs Birch and Irvine, afterwards called Seven Hills Station.

The adjoining station was Smeaton Hill which had just been occupied by Captain Hepburn .

After spending a few days very pleasantly, we returned home.

During this excursion, we found the only emu's nest that I ever found in the Colony, it contained nineteen eggs.

We also came upon a brood of young emus feeding about with the hen emu.

With some difficulty, I caught two or three of them, and carried them home with me for the purpose of rearing them as pets. But they all died in a week of so."

Mr. Evans said that all of these settlers

mentioned in Mr. Russell's narrative had arrived in Victoria only a few months earlier. Hepburn and Coghill arrived at Smeaton in March 1838 with Coghill going on to settle at what is now the Ascot district.

Pettet who was running Dowling Forest for "Big Clarke" arrived in April 1838. Birch settled at Kingston on "Seven Hills" estate just a short period after the arrival of Hepburn.

Mr. Russell was at Golf Hill, Shelford, from where he travelled to Andersons Station at Sebastopol (Winter's Flat) thence to Lake Wendouree (Yuille's). From there he must have travelled to the then head station of Dowling Forest at Pound Hill at Burrumbeet Creek before visiting Coghills whose homestead was west of Ascot township, finally terminating his outward journey at Smeaton Hill (Hepburns).

About the same time Anderson and Yuille were exploring the country to the west of Ballarat with a view to extending their pastoral operations.

At the foot of a mount they reportedly killed an emu, and consequently named the nearby mount, Mt. Emu.

From Russell's observations it would appear likely that there was a dearth or absence of emus in the Barwon region.

EXCURSION TO RICHARDS CAMP, MT. COLE.

Nine members of the club went on the excursion to Mt. Cole on December 5th 1982.

We parked initially at the Glut picnic area, walked some way up Turnbridges Track and across a fallen tree over the nearby creek. Despite many efforts, I think the writer ended up by being the only person who saw the crescent honeyeater. This was one of several birds that were not very obliging before lunch and we went back to Richards Camp with a very small bird count total and a very apprehensive leader; it's strange how all the

Birds who were there last week when one does a trial run, don't appear on the day.

Lunch at Richards Camp however completely altered the picture and I hope restored some faith in yours truly. The camp is a natural amphitheatre and many birds flitted across the stage. A scaly thrush put in an appearance on the southern side of the picnic ground, where the creek flows into a swampy area with many ferns and fallen trees. Red-browed finches, superb blue wrens, white throated tree creeper, yellow robin, several honeyeaters - all told we saw nine honeyeaters during the day. Earlier we had heard but not seen, satin-flycatcher and a male arrived before we set off on our afternoon walk.

By now it was fairly hot and we trudged up the tracks, first by the creek and then through open forest to the pipe line that supplies part of the water supply to Beaufort. Rejuvenated by the cold clear water perhaps, or by a desire to reach greater heights we clambered over rocks and through crevices to reach a small waterfall. One of the crevices



that we climbed through - proved to be nearly disastrous! The strap of a handbag broke and the handbag fell into a gap between enormous rocks - and there went camera, sunglasses, purse and so on. Valiant efforts with sticks proved unsuccessful. And then triumph - Ken Hammond squeezed his way into a cleft lower down and managed to save the day. I have yet to see the photograph of the rescue - though. I think we shall see more of the other end rather than his face

Our mountain climb terminated, we slithered and slid down the track beside the creek and returned to the picnic area in what must have been near record time. Tea over, we lingered on into the early evening with a male and female satin flycatcher and a well-observed grey fantail's nest with brooding bird to add to the pleasures of the day.

For me it was a real fun day in very good company enlivened by "fuzzies" - but that's another story. We finally left the car park at 6.40 pm.

As for the birds - my total for the day was 45 with wedgetailed eagle, yellow tailed black cockatoo, jacky winter, flame robin, golden and rufous whistlers, eastern shrike tit and those listed earlier as the best birds for the day.

Frank Harrap.

Our Cover: Harvey Hooper at Mosquito Flat with our President Dr. Harrap, examines a map of the area before journeying to view the most northerly recorded occurrence of furze.
